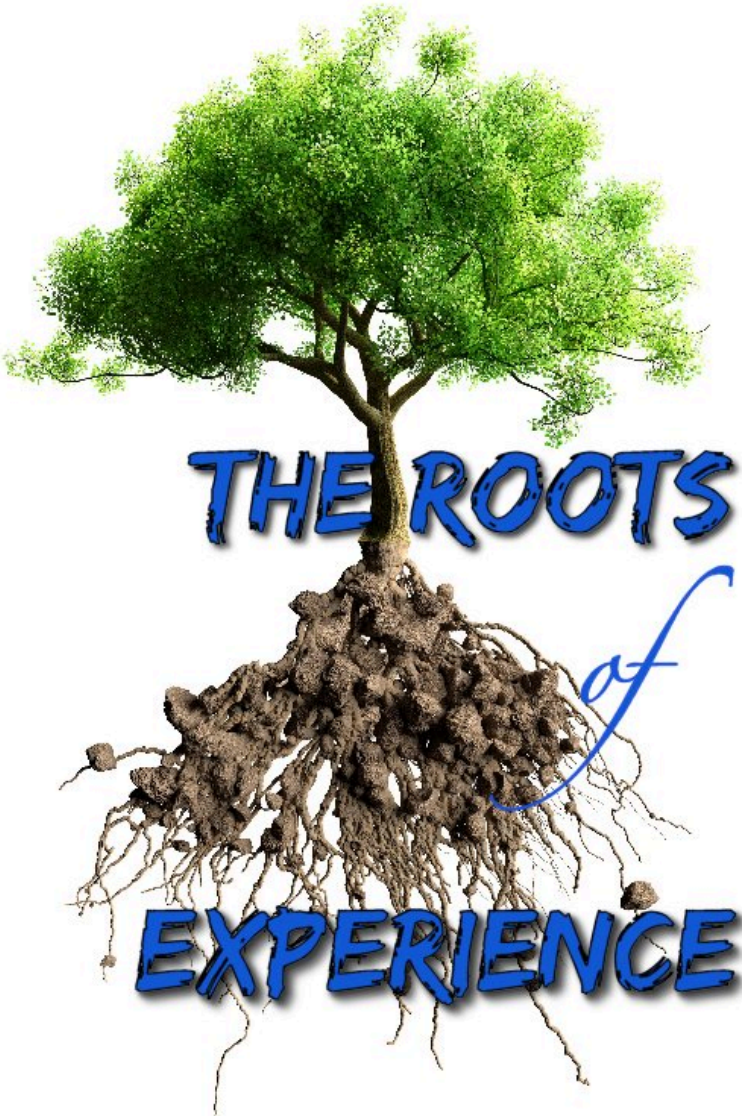
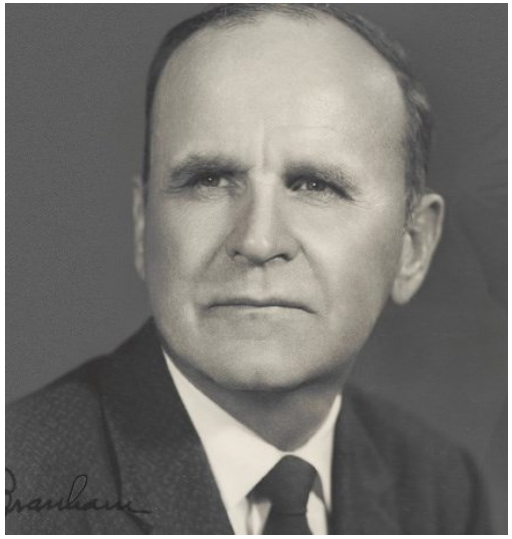


The Roots of Experience

The Created Reality of William Branham and his Healing Angel

By Cheryl Schatz



Experience is a good thing when it flows from the solid base of Scripture, but when experience is used as the standard for measuring everything else, experience becomes a conduit for deception. I know of no greater example of this than William Branham who brought claims of angelic visitations and mysterious manifestations into his healing revivals. Today Branham is revered as the founder of the “Latter Rain” and “Word Faith” movements. Let’s examine the root of Branham’s spiritual experiences.

Branham’s History

William Marrion Branham was born in a small cabin on April 6, 1909, to an impoverished young family in Kentucky. Branham relates that at his birth, his then 15-year-old mother claimed she saw a large halo of light above him. In his youth, Branham claimed to have experienced frightening spiritual manifestations including angelic voices, heavenly visions, mysterious lights, and whirlwinds in a tree. When he shared his experiences with church leaders, they warned him that these manifestations were of the devil. Branham did not listen but chose to believe a fortune teller rather than heed the warnings given to him. Branham related a story about a fortune teller who called him out when he walked by her booth. She said his birthdate was significant in the world of astrology and that she recognized his spirit.

Branham later used her words to reinforce his teaching that “before God does anything on earth, He declares it in the heavens.” Using the Magi and the star of Bethlehem as his example, he claimed the same star that led the Magi to Jesus, also appeared at his own birth.

Branham began a search for God. Branham attended a Pentecostal Baptist church where he became an assistant pastor. He was uneducated but had an ability to keep audiences spellbound with his many tales of encounters with angels. Later he happened upon a Oneness Pentecostal meeting where he was picked out of the crowd and asked to preach as a guest pastor. Oneness Pentecostals, also known as Apostolic or Jesus’ Name Pentecostals are non-Trinitarians who believe that baptism (restricted to Jesus’ name alone) along with speaking in tongues are necessary for salvation. Branham was booked to speak in other Oneness churches, but he was dissuaded from fulfilling the invitations because of his mother-in-law’s objections. He built his own church in 1933 calling it the Pentecostal Tabernacle and the name was later changed to Branham Tabernacle. By the 1940’s Branham once again became affiliated with the Oneness Pentecostals after losing his wife and daughter in a flood. Branham believed the disaster happened because God was angry with him for listening to his mother-in-law’s objections. Branham subsequently joined the Oneness Pentecostal faith and set out to travel around the world to pray for the sick. He partnered with Ern Baxter who would preach the sermons while Branham would pray for the sick. Frank Bosworth, a faith healer who received his doctrinal teaching from the late John Alexander Dowie, also joined them. Dowie was a self-professed healer who claimed he was Elijah the Restorer. Many of Dowie’s healing events were staged using audience plants, and he was successfully sued for having committed securities fraud. Branham became familiar with Dowie’s teaching, and he noted the large following that Dowie had. Branham, like Dowie, went on to claim that he was the end-time prophet “Elijah” for the Laodicean church age.

Branham’s Healing Revivals

In the healing revivals, Branham’s associates would issue prayer cards to the sick and ask them to write down their illnesses, their names, and their addresses. The cards were collected by ushers, numbered, and given to Branham for prayer. Branham would call out numbers, and as people came up to the pulpit for prayer, Branham would claim to know their names and their addresses and the diseases that they had. He said that this gift was given to him by the angel who appeared to him. He claimed to be able to read people’s thoughts, calling this “discernment”. Branham claimed that the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the form of a man instructing him to elevate the people’s faith in William Branham. The angel said “If you can get the people to believe in you, then nothing will stand in your way, not even cancer.” So Branham would tell people that their healing was dependent on whether they believed with all their heart that he was God’s servant. Mainstream and Oneness Pentecostals were flocking to him in droves. All affirmed the belief that Branham was God’s servant. “Unfortunately, his healing prognosis was accurate only in rare cases. The excuse of healing evangelists in such cases has always been: The patient did not really believe; for they were convinced that faith leads automatically to health.” (Walter Hollenweger, Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide.)

Branham's healing angels

Branham's accounts of his angelic encounters frequently changed through the years. At times the angel was said to have appeared as a clean-shaven man, and the next time he was a man with a long, black beard, a man with a white beard or a man wearing a turban. The angelic encounter occurred in either a cave or a cabin with a window, or another unknown location, depending on when Branham was spinning the tale. Branham recited the angel's words, "As Moses was given two signs, so you are given two signs." (Contrary to the "angel's" word, Moses was given three signs, not two.) The angel promised to be with Branham, and Branham could do no healings without the angel's presence. When the angel was present to heal, Branham said he was given the sign of vibrations in his hands.

In 1950, during a debate with other ministers who opposed his ministry, photographs were taken of Branham, and one of them surfaced with a white streak of light above his head. Although no one saw the light in person, Branham claimed that the image on the photograph was the same Pillar of Fire that led the children of Israel out of Egypt!

Branham went on to condemn other churches calling them "evil ones" especially (Trinitarian) Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Those who attended a denomination of faith other than Branham's were said to have the "Mark of the Beast." Branham taught that Jesus was Michael the archangel, that Christ was born by immaculate conception, yet was nothing more than a man, and that Christ did not become the God-man until his baptism, did not have the power to heal unless he saw a vision from the Father, and died as nothing more than a man! Branham's teachings were heretical, and they also elevated his own importance. According to Branham, he was the coming one upon whom lay the fulfillment of prophecy. This left his followers in disbelief when Branham died suddenly in 1965.

Branham's condemnation of Christians

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Branham's unfulfilled prophecies

The prophecies were to be fulfilled before the second coming of Jesus, and they were to lead up to the end of the age which was to come in 1977. Branham's death in a car accident left his followers struggling to reconcile the unfulfilled visions. Branham was supposed to be the prophesied Elijah who would usher in the coming of Christ. Some had put so much faith in Branham that they believed that he would rise from the dead to fulfill the prophecies. They had a need for his leadership, for Branham taught that God abandoned any person who did not follow God's designated messenger. Anyone rejecting Branham as God's prophet and messenger would result in their eternal destruction. Branham had the marks of a false prophet. While the Bible lifts up Jesus as God's messenger, Branham lifted up himself. He claimed to speak for God yet contradicted God's word. He said the men were to divorce their wives if they cut their hair, yet God said that He hates divorce. Branham said that people would have to face him at the day of judgment if they didn't obey, but Jesus is our judge, not William Branham. At the end of his life after promoting himself as the coming Elijah, he gave an astonishing claim that this new Elijah was not a man — he was God! He also claimed that Christ died, not righteous, but He died as a sinner. The year that Branham died, he taught that before there was a beginning, God lived alone, and He was not God back then! He taught that the original Bible faith that was supposedly lost was to be restored by the seventh angel through him. William Branham's experiences with his personal healing angel resulted in his claim at the end of his life that God was not God in eternity past, and that he, as the last messenger of God, was the coming Elijah, who was not a man—but God! The Bible warns us about false humility and the worship of angels.

Branham revered as the Messenger

Branham's followers today see Branham as the Messenger, and believe that they are in God's truth called "The Message." How is it possible that they still see him as "humble"? Humility is a modest opinion or estimate of one's own importance. Branham certainly was not humble, for unbelief in him brought spiritual death. What Branham had was a façade of humility. He was soft-spoken and had a superficial appearance of a quiet spirit, as he did not raise his voice when he cast out demons or pronounced healing to a person. However, no humble servant of God speaks false prophecy or twists Scripture to bolster their importance. Yet today, many are willing to ignore Branham's puffed up words and distortion of the Word because they want to believe that healing is guaranteed. But miracles and exorcisms are not signs of a true prophet without a righteous lifestyle and adherence to the Scriptures. Jesus Himself said:

Matthew 7:22–2322 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

We cannot ignore the signs of lawlessness that are clear to anyone who will look objectively at the facts found in Branham's own mouth. Branham's sermons were recorded in audio and video throughout his ministry. These sermons are evidence of false claims, exaggeration, and lies in the name of the Lord.

Deception was Branham's tool

Branham used deception to manipulate the facts, gain sympathy and followers, and to introduce his own doctrine. Branham claimed that he was illiterate because his father died when he was just a child living in the little cabin in Kentucky. He claimed he had to go hunting to supply food for the large family of 9 children, but none of that is true. The records show that the family moved from the Kentucky cabin to Indiana when William was under three years old. His father did not die when he was a young child as he claimed. He died when Branham was in his late twenties and already married with two children of his own. Branham's story of being forced into the wilderness to supply food for his siblings is nothing but fiction. Branham claimed that it was in the wilderness as a young child when God revealed Himself to him in burning bushes, whirlwinds, and in flickering lights. His lies about his childhood are just the tip of the iceberg.

Branham denied the Trinity, calling it gross error. He taught that Jesus was an angel who was equal to Satan. He also taught that God's creation in the Garden of Eden did not include the woman. Instead, the woman was designed by Satan to deceive, and she was nothing more than a bi-product of man. Original sin was her fault instead of Adam's. He taught that all women were vulgar, foul, and loathsome creatures. Branham taught the creation story mixed in with Jewish mysticism from the Kabbalah where original sin is said to be sexual intercourse between the serpent and Eve, which produced the evil son (Cain). Branham promoted this teaching as fundamental for faith for the last days "Bride". Branham also claimed that there were three Bibles: The Zodiac, the Pyramids and the King James Bible. Braham believed Masonic teachings that the pyramids were hidden truths. Branham was buried beneath a pyramid because the pyramid was so important to him. Because Branham's messages are readily available, it is not hard to point out his inconsistencies, deceptive teachings, and fictionalized stories. Branham may have had contact with a spirit, but it was not from God.

What is sad is that Branham's followers today still listen to his teachings and read his sermons. They have been taught that to be saved one must believe in William Branham to merit salvation and participate in the rapture. Jesus has been overshadowed by Branham as Branham's followers lift him up to place of adoration.